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Senate Agrees, Boating Hit-and-Run a Felony

Punishment now same as vehicular hit-and-run

LANSING – Legislation imposing stricter sentencing guidelines for boaters involved in hit-and-run accidents was unanimously approved Wednesday by the Senate.

Co-sponsored by Sen. Jud Gilbert (R-Algonac) Senate Bills 658 and 659 change the penalties from a misdemeanor to a felony for the operator of a boat involved in a hit-and-run accident resulting in death or serious injury. The change makes the penalty for this crime the same as those for a hit-and-run accident causing death or serious injury in an automobile.

“The law should make no distinction between hit-and-run with a car versus hit-and-run with a boat,” said Gilbert. “This legislation will give law enforcement a more effective tool in cracking down on irresponsible boaters who put others at risk.”

Currently, the driver of a boat involved in such an accident is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a maximum sentence of 90 days. Under the proposed changes, someone guilty of failing to stop at the scene of a marine accident causing death would be guilty of a felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison and up to \$10,000 in fines. Someone guilty of failing to stop at the scene of a marine accident causing serious impairment would be guilty of a felony punishable by up to five years in prison and up to \$5,000 in fines.

Senate Bills 658 and 659 now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.